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United States Department of Agriculture

Science and Education Administration

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Higher Education in USDA's Science and Education Administration



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If the United States is to continue as the lead Nation in resolving problems of increasing global population and decreasing agricultural and natural resources, it must continue to produce a sufficient number of individuals with expertise in the food and agricultural sciences to meet the needs of the food and agricultural professions. Within the next 20 years, agriculture will be faced with the task of feeding twice as many people as are now living on earth—and of striving to reduce death due to malnutrition, starvation, and disease.

Congress responded to these problems in 1977 when it designated the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as the lead agency in the Federal Government for food and agricultural sciences (Public Law 95-113). This act emphasizes that agricultural teaching, along with research and extension, is a distinct mission of the Department of Agriculture.

The Office of Higher Education was established in 1978 in the Science and Education Administration (SEA) of USDA to carry out that responsibility—to provide direction and national leadership to strengthening formal education and training programs in the food and agricultural sciences and to producing the types of college graduates needed by the labor force.

The office works closely with associations and organizations representing colleges and universities throughout the United States. Its objectives are to—

- Provide national leadership and coordination on issues relating to higher education in the food and agricultural sciences.
- Assist colleges and universities in developing and maintaining superior education programs in the food and agricultural sciences.
- Help assure that colleges and universities produce a sufficient number of graduates to satisfy the Nation's needs for individuals trained in the food and agricultural sciences.



Higher education programs in the food and agricultural sciences include programs in agriculture, natural resources, forestry, veterinary medicine, and home economics. They deal with the production, processing, marketing, distribution, conservation, consumption, and research and development of food and agriculturally related products and services.

The Office of Higher Education is concerned with all accredited public or private institutions of postsecondary education that grant baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees, or first professional degrees, in the food and agricultural sciences. It relates the concerns of these institutions to other USDA and Federal agencies, the Congress, and the public.

Cooperating Institutions and Organizations

A universal goal of higher education is to develop talent that can respond to the technological, scientific, and humanitarian needs of society.

The Office of Higher Education works closely with representatives of colleges of agriculture and natural resources, home economics, veterinary medicine, and forestry and professional organizations to help achieve its objectives.

These cooperators help identify major issues facing higher education in the food and agricultural sciences and help assign priorities to these issues.

Cooperators are helping identify the components needed for a national data base for future use in planning, administering, and evaluating programs in higher education in the food and agricultural sciences.

They advise on design and conduct of assessments of the supply of and demand for graduates, and they help develop guidelines for competitive grant and fellowship programs.

Among cooperating organizations and institutions are the following:

- Colleges and universities with programs in the food and agricultural sciences.
- Resident Instruction Committee on Organization and Policy, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.
- American Association of University Agricultural Administrators, American Association of State Colleges and Universities.
- Council of Forestry School Executives.
- Association of State College and University Forestry Research Organizations.
- Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges.
- American Home Economics Association.
- Association of Administrators of Home Economics.
- National Council of Administrators of Home Economics.
- The National Teaching Committee and Regional Teaching Committees of USDA's Joint Council on Food and Agricultural Sciences.



Responsibilities and Functions

In serving as the national focus for issues relating to higher education in the food and agricultural sciences, the Office of Higher Education has these specific responsibilities:

- Provision of leadership, through cooperation with colleges and universities, to maintain and further develop the strength of instructional programs in the food and agricultural sciences.
- Administration of the Bankhead-Jones Act, which authorizes funds to support agricultural teaching programs at land-grant institutions. Congress appropriated \$11.5 million for Bankhead-Jones funding in fiscal year 1981. The funds are distributed to land-grant institutions based in part on a population-related formula.
- Administration of grants to strengthen undergraduate and graduate programs in the food and agricultural sciences and fellowships to encourage promising students to enter careers in the food and agricultural sciences, as authorized by the Food and Agricultural Act of 1977. Congress did not appropriate funds for the grant and fellowship programs in fiscal year 1981.
- Coordination of USDA participation in the Minority Research Apprenticeship Program. In its first year, 1980, this program provided 165 minority youths with summer apprenticeships under the sponsorship of various USDA agencies, including SEA, the Forest Service, and the Economics and Statistics Service.
- Provision of leadership, and cooperation with other Federal agencies, in developing and implementing a comprehensive plan to recruit more females and minorities into higher education and subsequent employment in the food and agricultural professions.

A major function of the Office of Higher Education is to evaluate the supply of and demand for expertise in the food and agricultural professions, including farming, ranching, banking, manufacturing, and merchandising, and to determine if colleges are producing enough graduates to meet the needs.



The first results of a study on this subject were published in 1980 in "Graduates of Higher Education in the Food and Agricultural Sciences: An Analysis of Supply/Demand Relationships, Volume I—Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Veterinary Medicine," USDA Miscellaneous Publication No. 1385. Volume II of the study, which covers graduates in home economics, was published in 1981 as USDA Miscellaneous Publication No. 1407. Both volumes show that more college graduates, especially those with advanced degrees, are needed than are projected through the eighties. A continuation of the study will include an assessment of sex, race, and ethnicity characteristics of graduates in the food and agricultural sciences and of professionals in food and agricultural positions.

Because the education/labor force study revealed the need for a more comprehensive data base, the office is developing a national data base on higher education in the food and agricultural sciences. In addition to statistics on the supply of and demand for food and agricultural science graduates, the data base will include data on college and university faculty employment, instructional facilities and equipment, major program offerings, graduate assistantships, financial information, and other subjects. This information should be useful in educational planning and administration at the national, regional, and State levels.

The office also conducts information and data searches as requested by professional organizations, colleges and universities, Members of Congress, and individual educators and students.

For more information, contact—

Assistant Director,
Higher Education,
Science and Education Administration,
U.S. Department of Agriculture,
Washington, D.C. 20250.

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